



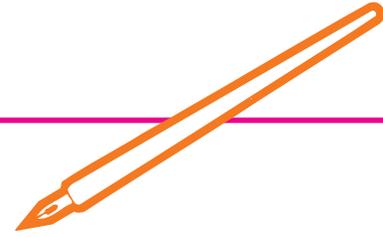
# Clarion

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*Being a Christian  
in today's culture*

By C. Van Dam



## Christian home culture

When we speak of present day culture, we usually refer to the integrated pattern of thinking, speaking and expression that is found in our world today. Such a pattern of behaviour shows itself in many ways. We perceive it in many ways: in the way people discuss and reason on radio talk shows, in the way artists and musicians express themselves in their works, in the way reporters report on events, in the arguments politicians come up with to justify their actions. Culture is all comprehensive. As Christians we breathe the cultural atmosphere in which we find ourselves.

Although we must be thankful that there is some restraining power of residual Christian influence, our culture today is increasingly reflecting values that are at odds with Biblical norms. This means that Christians can experience difficulty in seeking to live in our modern world with clear Christian priorities and principles. This problem also finds expression in judging the entertainment industry, music, art, and the media.

Concerns such as these prompted the Burlington Reformed Study Centre to host a four part series on "Being a Christian in Today's Culture" last November. Mr. Dan Veldman of Memphis, Tennessee, who is thoroughly familiar with current youth culture, provided a Reformed look at the problems and solutions to the kind of dilemmas Christian young people face today. His three part presentation was followed by Dr. N.D. Kloosterman's speech "How do Pilgrims have Fun?" Dr. Kloosterman's speech is published in this issue of *Clarion*, as is a summary of the speeches of Mr. Dan Veldman. One item that kept coming up in these meetings is the great importance of a solid Christian home. It is even more important than school for moulding opinions and attitudes, and for sensitizing the next generation to Christian values and life style.

That raises the question: "What sort of home life is best for our young people as they prepare to live and work in the world of today?" I raise this question because I fear that in too many instances, our homes could be losing or are in danger of losing their Reformed character. Under worldly pressures, especially from the mass media, homes once Reformed are becoming carbon copies of a typical secular home – often unconsciously.

There are several areas in which we need to watch and work in order to have Christian home culture. More could be added, but let me mention these. First, our homes need parents who take seriously their God-given calling to raise their children in the fear of the LORD. Such parents will ensure several things. They will form the human focal point and make the home a place where the family meets and interacts. A home is not just a place where individuals sleep, but it is a place where a family lives and speaks together as a vibrant community. As the human focal point, Christian parents will give firm and loving leadership and exercise discipline as needed. They will be there for the children when needed.

They will be the obvious choice of every member of the family for a listening ear, direction, encouragement or getting back on track. Parents, thus committed to their office, will set the tone and provide the framework within which Christian culture can flourish at home. This brings up the next point.

A Christian home is a home that thrives around an open Bible. We live in an age of the image, especially TV and video. Christians however will always remain, first and foremost, people of the Book, the Word of God. The Word has the last say in all family discussions and disputes. Blessed is the family that daily reads Scripture together as a complete family (around the supper table, for instance). A good modern Bible translation is critical to help children and teens understand that the Word of God addresses them. In such a setting the issues of the day can be discussed, debated and prayed about. Then Christian culture blossoms, for all is subjected to the Word. It is the norm for all our thinking, speaking and actions. Besides the reading and discussing of Scripture, it is also an excellent idea to sing together as a family after supper. (What an incentive for members of the family to learn how to play a musical instrument!) Systematically singing through the *Book of Praise* one day at a time is a most enriching experience. As the family so prays and worships, it grows together in the knowledge of God as expressed in the Psalms. Singing through the Psalms is also experiencing a form of Christian culture. A family nurtured on the Word in this way presents a strong bulwark to the enemy and has a very fine sense of what fits within the norm of the Word of God and His holiness. In such a home, the question of whether the TV should be on or off can be dealt with Biblically. How edifying or helpful such a medium even is, can be dealt with as well.

With the Word of God in the centre, Christian parents will be able to instil in the members of the family a clear sense of what is most important. In our busy lives we constantly have to be prioritizing. What is most important from Christ's point of view? In an age of materialism and the passion for more and more, we must be on our guard not to bow to Mammon. When new needs arise and we consider how they must be met, we must always ask ourselves how what we plan to do will affect our family. For example, is it really justified in view of the well being of our children for mother to work outside the home or is another way possible? The Lord only gives us the children for a short time and the young years are critical for establishing the gospel of salvation and its repercussions in their lives. If there are financial problems, could we do with a smaller home or a less expensive vehicle? Do we need all the things we are buying? A generation or so ago people lived in smaller homes, with generally larger families, and were at least as happy as people are today. Because the god Materialism keeps demanding more, without an end in sight, the question also arises whether it

is really necessary for teens to go out and work through-out the school year at the cost of Christian family life, their education, and critical sleep. In the end, much of the money earned is often spent on frivolous things or items they could better do without, such as stereos or TVs for their bedrooms. These are often purchased, to the detriment of family life and their own well being.

If a Christian home functions properly, there is a clear sense of direction and purpose. There is also mutual support and growth in the Lord Jesus Christ. As they grow up, children in such a home become increasingly brothers and sisters of their parents: they together with their parents are children of the Father who is in heaven. In such a home, Christian culture flourishes and an oasis of joy and peace in Christ is established in a world that is both unhappy and in upheaval. Such a home is where children want to be and spend time together as a family. There they can constantly be re-orientated to the true purpose and goal of life.

Such a Christian home has its own culture and lifestyle. But only if we have our own Christian culture can we possibly talk about having any impact on the culture of the world outside. First there must be an integrated Christian pattern of thinking, speaking and expression in our homes. Then we can truly judge the offerings of the world (in the media, literature and arts) and make a beginning of renewing the culture of our times and seeking to transform society. We should never lose sight of that goal (albeit with our feet on the ground, and not in arrogant unjustified optimism.)

The whole world and all that is in it does belong to the Lord; His claim starts with the beautiful small world right in our homes. Let us start Christian culture there! 

## What's inside?

This issue is all about culture. Anyone half awake is aware that great cultural changes are taking place, and not for the better. Thirty-five years ago one could not utter the word "water closet" on late night television without facing the ire of viewers. Today nothing is hidden anymore. All taboos have been obliterated. We allow shock jock Howard Stern to propagate his syndicated pornographic filth on day time radio. Even young children are exposed to an overload of sexual innuendo and violence. Community standards are steadily eroded. The millions who view and listen to the raunchy fare served up by the media become ever more desensitized. Perverse ideas play upon the minds of vulnerable ones who can and do adopt the filthy talk and antichristian slant of contemporary media. In order to arm us against the enemy, the Burlington Reformed Study Centre organized a four part series on how Christians interact with today's culture. Several of the articles and the editorial in this issue are results of this series.

We are very pleased to introduce a new column – "Observation Deck." One of our emeritus, and yet active ministers, the Rev. J. VanRietschoten, is going to scan the horizons to see what is going on in church fellowships throughout the world.

We finish off with some reports, reviews and releases.

Finally, I wish you all a very blessed 1998.

GvP



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# A letter to the readers from the Editor in Chief

## Changes aboard the good ship *Clarion*

### Co-editors

At the turn of the year the *Clarion* Editorial Committee has implemented a number of changes in the magazine and in the responsibilities of the co-editors and their assistants. The Rev. R. Schouten has told us that due to his task in his congregation, he could no longer be part of the sailors' crew of *Clarion*. We regret the loss of this able mariner but could only accept his decision. We hope that in the future the situation might change so that he can rejoin us. On the other hand, we are delighted to welcome aboard two new members to the crew. The Rev. R. Aasman, minister of the Providence Church in Edmonton, and Dr. N. H. Gootjes, the Dogmatics professor in Hamilton, were found willing to join up. We are thankful that they saw the need to set sail and to steer with us. We have no doubt that we will have good sailing together.

### Managing Editor – Language Editor

The Rev. G. Ph. van Popta has done an excellent job as our managing editor. He felt the crew a bit "undermanned," however, when Rev. Schouten left the ship. Rev. Schouten was our language editor. At first, Rev. Van Popta added this important task to his managerial work. Then, when he moved from Taber, in rural Alberta, to his new, larger, flock in suburban Ancaster, the cargo on deck became too much for one man to handle. We are thankful that his brother, the Rev. J. L. van Popta of Ottawa, was willing to come on board to take over the task of language editor. The editorial crew appreciates this true brotherly assistance and support for good sailing.

### *Treasures, Old and New; Hiliter; Observation Deck*

The Rev. J. L. Van Popta will also manage the *Meditation* page, which has been renamed *Treasures, Old & New*. The *Hiliter*, formerly known as *News Medley*, will also be under new management. The Rev. C. Van Spronsen informed us that he no longer has the time he needs to generate this column. We regret very much also the departure of this assistant-sailor. Rev. Van Spronsen served us all greatly in his own quiet way with news gleaned from the churches in North America and from "down-under" in Australia. "Thank you, heartily!" for your many contributions. We hope that you will not stop contributing totally. Also here, we added two other assistant sailors to replace the one who left. The Rev. J. de Gelder was found willing to replace Rev. Van Spronsen and continue the *Hiliter* column. The Rev. J. van Rietschoten will take care of a new column called *Observation Deck*, in which he will present news items gleaned from near and far, mainly drawing from the international ecclesiastical scene. One

could ask why we now need two persons for these two columns? Did the Rev. W.W.J. Van Oene not take care of both *News Medley* and *International News*? Yes, he did. (Of course, those were the "good old days.") It can be wise not to demand too much. We trust that weighing anchor with these two new sailors will make for a good addition to the hands on deck.

### The Captain

There is one other, major, change. The chief-editorship, although remaining within the present editorial staff, has gone to Dr. C. Van Dam. The undersigned is getting older while still having quite a task outside *Clarion* and so asked for relief from this responsibility. For the time being, he hopes to continue sailing with the crew, but no longer as their Captain. We are (and especially, I am) thankful that Dr. Van Dam is willing to take over the helm. It will free up time for me to do other work.

Let me take this opportunity to say a few words about the Captain's responsibility. The editor-in-chief deals with the *contents* of the magazine. It is his task to read through all contributions presented for publication. He must judge all material received. Does the material conform to Scripture and Confessions; is it Reformed? Furthermore, is the contribution up-building for the readership? It is also important to determine if the material is exegetically sound, and whether the antithesis between faith and unbelief, truth and lie, church and world, is properly maintained. This could mean that writers are asked to change what they have written to improve and / or correct their submissions. I am thankful for the many times contributors showed good cooperation when they accepted suggestions for improvement. At times, when minor suggestions were made, but in particular when major changes were considered necessary, other members on the bridge were consulted. This was specifically the case when differences of opinion were apparent. We did not want to present, to you the readers, conflicting and opposing opinions from one issue of *Clarion* to the next. Our aim has always been to set our compass in the Reformed direction and to sail the good ship *Clarion* on that course marked out by Secession (1834), Doleantie (1886), and Liberation (1944).

May the new Captain and all his crew, the veterans as well as the newly enlisted, receive strength from above. May God bless all the work for *Clarion* and through it edify all its readers and build up the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Your servant in the  
Lord Jesus Christ,  
J. Geertsema 

By J.L. Van Popta

# Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?

*Job 2:4 – “Skin for skin!” Satan replied. “A man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face.”*

*Job 2:9,10 – His wife said to him, “Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!” He replied, “You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?”*

Job, that rich man of the East, lived with integrity before the Lord. When God took all that he had, he yet acknowledged his God’s lordship over all his possessions and turned to his God for consolation. He confessed his faith, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; May the name of the LORD be praised” (Job 1:21). This is one of the greatest confessions of faith in the history of the world. “The LORD Yahweh gave – He is the one who gives all things. Now He has taken away – it is His right. We may not doubt that. May His name be praised!”

When Job makes this confession we must not think that he is making light of his loss. No, not at all. He is in deep grief and shock and sorrow. Yet he remains in that right relationship with God. Satan had said, “Strike Job down and he will turn from the LORD. Job will curse the LORD.” Satan is wrong, however. God’s people do not turn from the LORD in bad times. They turn to Him! At the beginning of a new year we should meditate on these things. Job was afraid that his children, in their affluence, would curse God (Job 1:5). Job will not, and does not, in his poverty. He does not charge God with wrong doing.

## Satan’s challenge

When Satan returned to appear before the LORD after Job’s ruination, the Lord God had said to Satan, “What of Job, Satan? You are wrong. Satan! Look at him! He maintains his integrity! Even though you have incited me to ruin him, to ruin him without cause.” Satan answered, “Job does not serve you without

good cause. You bless him; that is why he honours you.”

Notice that though it was Satan who did the dastardly deed, God says that Satan had incited him, the LORD, to ruin Job. Satan does not work outside of God’s authority. God takes full responsibility for Job’s situation. This is very important. This is a lesson we need to learn over and over. It is something on which we should reflect as we begin a new year. We must turn to God for deliverance from difficulty. Job did. He turned to God for God was in control.

**God’s people do not turn from the LORD in bad times. They turn to Him!**

“Job’s relationship with me has not changed, Satan,” God says at the accuser’s return. “He is still righteous, blameless and upright. He still fears me and shuns evil. You’re wrong, Satan.” But Satan says, “Skin for skin.” In other words, “Honour for blessing! Job knows that his life is in your hands and now he is just afraid of you. If he cursed you, he knows that you will take his health, maybe even his life.” Satan in effect says, “Job is a mercenary. Skin for skin.” This is a proverb that means that Job gives in return for what he gets from God’s hand. It is just an even trade. What Job is doing, according to the accuser, is nothing but a bargain. A man will give anything for his life. Everything is expendable but that. “But take his

health and he will curse you to your face. He will spit in your face. Job is a fake! His righteousness is hypocrisy!”

Satan conceded nothing. “There were too many restrictions. Do this and this, and you will see that his praying is but a lie.” And so God says, “Go ahead then. He is in your hands; but you may not kill him.” Satan wastes no time. He moves immediately. He strikes Job with illness. Job is afflicted with a terrible skin disease. He has terrible sores over his whole body. From later chapters we can learn more about his disease, for he mentions it many times. He had sores that scabbed over and turned black and oozed. He had fevers and chills, nightmares and delirium. Maggots would invest his sores. Stinking breath and excruciating pain plagued him. He was a living horror to those who saw him.

## Job’s response

And what does Job do? He sits in the ash heap and waits for the LORD. He will not curse God. Job is stricken with this deadly skin disease but God is confident that Job’s faithfulness is more than skin deep. Job’s commitment is to God; it is not to riches, health or fame. Job, we must remember, is ignorant of what is happening in heaven. He is not there when Satan accuses him of wickedness. Now the shadow of death falls over him. Job is confronted with his own frailty. He is afflicted with a terminal illness with no hope of recovery. His faith tested to the innermost core. Will he turn from God? What will Job say now?

His wife comes to him as he sits outside the city where the people cast the ashes from their ovens. There he is, in the garbage dump. Here people throw

out ashes and broken pottery. He scratches and scrapes his sores and his wounds. The momentary relief from the itch is welcome even though it will cause great pain. He scrapes himself and mourns in silence, waiting for God. His wife finds him. "Are you still holding on to your integrity?" Job's wife does not see his integrity as his greatest asset. No she sees it as fanaticism. "Realize your situation, man! Give it up. God is against you. Can't you see that? There is no point in going on. Curse God and die." Job should strike out at God, the cause of his troubles. Perhaps He will strike back and finish it off. Job who feared that his family members would curse God in their hearts is now told by his wife to do so himself. The one who bore his children, she has no patience for this any more. "I reared them all in vain. They are all dead. And now you too are in the midst of terrible suffering. Get it over with. God is your enemy! Curse him and die. It makes no difference at all!" She speaks on earth the temptation Satan had engineered in heaven. This is the essence of the temptation. "It is folly to hold to your integrity in the face of such tragedy." This is Satan's charge: "All that a man has he will give for his life. Take all away and he will lose his integrity."

But Job in strongest terms says, "No! No! My wife, you speak like the foolish women. You speak as one who denies that God exists. The fool says in his heart there is no God. No, your counsel is utter foolishness. Cursing God is not the way of escape from suffering.

That is not the answer." That he knows. He maintains his unwavering allegiance to God. "Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" Here is the question of the book of Job. "Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In his question he says, "Yes, we must accept the trouble." But not passively. Life does not just happen to us. We must accept what comes in an active working way. Job is in total submission to God, and his wife is a fool for

**For this I know, that God is at my side. I trust in Him; He will not leave me.**

suggesting her recommended course of action. He does not answer back to God, in the way his wife suggested. He does not shake his fist at God as Satan had predicted. No. He silences both. "Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?" Job confesses, "For this I know, that God is at my side. I trust in him; he will not leave me." In Q&A 44 of the Heidelberg Catechism we confess: "In my greatest sorrows and temptations I may be assured and comforted that my Lord Jesus Christ, by His unspeakable anguish, pain, terror, and agony, which He endured throughout all His sufferings but especially on the cross, has delivered me from the anguish and torment of hell." Job knew

that God had delivered him though he did not yet experience it completely. The Lord Jesus also offered up cries and tears to the one who could save Him from death (Heb. 5:7). He, like Job, did not curse God and die. No, He accepted the trouble, and on the cross, at His hour of death, committed His spirit into the hands of His Father.

### **Ezekiel 14:14 – Job, Noah and Daniel**

Ezekiel says that Job and Noah and Daniel could not save the land with their righteousness. The most righteous people of all time could not stand in for others. I know, however, that the Lord Jesus stood in for me! Job's suffering was great; he did not know why. The Lord Jesus' suffering was greater; and we do know why – that his righteousness might become ours: and Job's. When we, in our daily life, now are burdened we do not always understand. Difficulties come our way. Age and its infirmities strike us. Old age is blessing from the Lord but it is not without troubles. We have troubles in our families, troubles in our churches, troubles in our work-place, troubles with our health. We carry burdens of a broken world before the Lord. Time itself lays burdens upon us. We cannot often answer the "Why?" and the "Wherefore?" But then, will we accept good from God and not trouble? We know that we do not stand alone – also not this year, for our Lord Jesus accepted the "trouble," that we might receive the "good." 

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## **Being a Christian in today's culture**

*By G.Ph. van Popta*

In November, 1997, the Burlington Reformed Study Centre organized a four part series at Redeemer College, in Ancaster, on how Christians should interact with today's culture. Dr. N.D. Kloosterman, professor of Ethics at Mid-American Reformed Seminary, spoke one evening. His speech was engagingly entitled. "How Do Pilgrims Have Fun? Christians En Route." We have pub-

lished that speech in its entirety elsewhere in this issue.

Previous to Dr. Kloosterman, Mr. Dan Veldman, a Christian school teacher from Memphis, Tennessee, spoke two evenings and one morning. Mr. Veldman has a broad knowledge of and experience in Christian world view issues. A very high impact speaker, he keeps his audience with him for the full 75 minutes he speaks. This speaker does not use a

lectern. He makes extensive use of an overhead projector, rapidly goes through piles of transparencies, and roams back and forth across the stage, speaking at lightning speed. On Friday evening, Mr. Veldman addressed the question: "What is happening to our culture?" On Saturday morning, he held a session geared especially for young people and students entitled: "What today's young people say it is *really* like out there." The Saturday

evening speech was: "How do Christians live in the world without being part of it?" Rather than report on each presentation, I will try to draw out the main lines which Mr. Veldman drew.

Using many images and examples, Mr. Veldman spoke about contemporary culture, how Christians interact with it, and how Christians *ought* to relate to it. He noted that in many respects we (Reformed Christians) are doctrinally conservative, but culturally liberal. He warned against naiveté. Often we do not realize the force of today's culture, and the powerful effect it can and does have on our lives as families and individuals. Also among conservative Reformed Christians, there is an increased desire to attain goals respected by contemporary culture. There is an increasing concern about perception rather than substance. Style has become all-important.

Since we live within our present culture, we often do not see the direction in which it is moving. Just as one sitting in the middle of an airplane has no real sense of the movement and direction of the flight, so we often do not have a sense of the direction culture is going. We need a window seat. Then we can orientate ourselves and see where we are going. A person at the window can see when the jet goes

above or below the clouds, and has a sense of how near to or far from the ground the jet is. So we need a norm to orientate ourselves as we live, work and play within a culture. That norm, of course, is Scripture.

In one generation, we have experienced a huge cultural paradigm shift. What used to be taboo is today openly flaunted. The shift is seen in attitudes, morals and ethics. The technological advances have also aided this dramatic shift. In previous generations, parents could more easily keep their children naive and innocent longer. Families could live in "popular" culture without being exposed to sensuality, sex, and abuse. Today we need to remove naiveté from our children in order to protect them from the culture of today. This takes much wisdom and sensitivity. We should keep children innocent as long as possible, but at the same time recognize the need to arm them against what they will be exposed to before the world's culture overwhelms them. A number of times, the speaker spoke about not *isolating* the children, but *insulating* them.

He spoke often about how the shift away from the truth is at first very small. The "naive observer" will not at all be alarmed about a tiny step from the truth of Scriptures. However, the "perceiver"

sees that the little step away from that which is true will, in the long run, take someone far afield. We need to hold, and hold fast, to the Scriptural standards for how we are to live. When a church or school begins to focus on the question: "Why not?," it is already in trouble. Lately, the burden of proof has been on those who want to maintain *status quo* for how things are done and looked at. Mr. Veldman emphasized that the burden of proof must always be on those who want change. They need to prove that the proposed change is Biblically permissible.

The speaker warned against the power and influence of Satan in a culture hostile to Christians. He called him the number one serial killer, and the stalker. Satan does not hit us Reformed Christians in the head or mind, where we are strong; rather, he hits us where we are weak, in the body. He hits us with things that feel pleasurable. He creates in us a low self-image by having the media tell us how to be happy and how to look good. He has cornered the market on "what's cool" – TV, music, all media. He takes advantage of naive and busy parents. Before parents know it, they have lost their children to the stalker Satan, the number one serial killer. We, especially parents, need to foil the plan of Satan. We need to stalk





him back. Mr. Veldman mentioned seven things parents need to do to insulate their children and prepare them for the world:

1. Families need to eat together at a table with the TV off, and to pray before and after the meal.
2. Parents need to be around and available.
3. Parents need to love their children enough to discipline them.
4. Parents need to sacrifice time for their children (the pay-off for parents is that the children will then be inclined to sacrifice time for their parents when mom and dad are old – otherwise, the parents had better not count on it).
5. Parents need to sacrifice prestige and “toys” for their children.
6. Daycare is a no-no. *Any* child would rather be at home with mom during the day than at daycare with mom out working bringing home more money and buying more toys.
7. Parents need to hold their children tight when they are young and let them go gradually.

Mr. Veldman repeatedly emphasized the importance of the family. Parents need to talk to their children. Children need to be known, to be liked, to know that they matter, to be understood and accepted by their parents, and to be a part of something bigger than themselves. Our culture is taking children away from the family. Parents need to take their children back. (See sidebar for some of Mr. Veldman’s suggestions for how parents can stay in a close relationship to their children.)

He also suggested that congregations take back Saturday night. He suggested a Saturday evening of fun at the

church. Mix the ages, and have fun and laugh together. The church can do much more to become not only the *spiritual* centre of the lives of its parishioners, but also the *cultural* centre. Take Saturday night back from the enemy.

The speaker called the audience to revolution. He said that we must become rebels and raise our children to be rebels. We need to rebel against the media. Don’t, he said, beat the rebel out of your children, but channel it against that which is hostile to the Christian faith in our culture.

Mr. Dan Veldman has a different style of speaking than is typical among us. He did tend to go “all over the map” as he spoke. His presentations were less structured and organized than we are used to. However, in my estimation, what he said was completely trustworthy. There is no doubt that the hun-



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dreds of people who heard him speak in Ancaster this past November were powerfully challenged to examine how they interact with contemporary culture and to apply courageously Biblical standards to every aspect of family life. 

## How parents can stay close to their children:

1. **Be winsome.** Have fun with your children realizing that it is not *what* you do but *how* you do it.
2. **Be aware.** Now what is “out there.”
3. **Be right.** Be confident about what is right and what is wrong. Do not be scared to say Yes and No.
4. **Have respect.** Be respectful of your children, and teach them respect.
5. **Be informed.** Read, read, read.
6. **Be open.** Talk to your children and listen to them.
7. **Be rebellious.** Have zero tolerance for the enemy. Stay focussed and do not give an inch. Rebel against antichristian media.
8. **Be self-disciplined.** Discipline yourself according to the norms of Scriptures, and teach your children to be disciplined.

# How do pilgrims have fun?<sup>1</sup>

By N.D. Kloosterman

## The need for this discussion<sup>1</sup>

Here are some facts which, taken together, indicate why we Christians should be talking about how to have fun:

- there are over one billion television sets in use around the world
- MTV reaches over 257 million home in sixty-eight territories on five continents
- a 1990 cover story in *Fortune* identified America's hottest export to be pop culture, explaining that taken together, American movies, music, television programs and home videos generated an annual trade surplus of nearly \$8 billion
- the pop culture entertainment industry has become the battleground for so-called "culture wars," with new alignments emerging to fight for "family values," ratings systems, and more policing of the airwaves

Debates continue to rage today concerning adequate definitions of high art and entertainment. Is entertainment truly art? Is one of art's functions that it entertain? Do art and entertainment have distinct social functions? Careful studies are now showing how popular culture affects the way people perceive reality (studies like Kenneth A. Myers, *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes: Christians and Popular Culture* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1989]). Among the most foundational philosophical studies of the cultural impact of television is *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, by Neil Postman (New York, Penguin Books, 1985). Postman describes the shift from print to visual media in terms of how we know what we know, and observes that "as the influence of print wanes, the content of politics, religion, education, and anything else that comprises public business must change and be recast in terms that are most suitable to television" (p. 8). Clearly something is going on here that is worth Christians talking about.



The title of this essay, "How Do Pilgrims Have Fun?," selects from the range of Biblical word-pictures the metaphor of *pilgrim*, because I believe this one best captures the relationship between the *church* as God's called-out, redeemed people, and the *world* which is comprised of that set of relationships and values dominated by that fleshly, old-nature existence which dwells in enmity with God and comes to cultural expression, especially in the communication media. And I have narrowed the focus to one area of cultural interaction, that of leisure. For it is this particular area that seems to pose the greatest challenge to Christian conscience, where issues of Christian liberty and participation are most pressing.

Let's clarify expectations before moving further. In this essay we probably won't be able to answer all the questions about whether teens should watch

MTV or attend heavy metal rock concerts or whether *Beavis and Butthead* will help us think better. But our priority must be to construct a platform, a context of understanding, an awareness of the function of entertainment in modern culture.

So we ask first: What is a pilgrim?, and find an answer in two directions: the *status* of being a pilgrim, and the *ethic* corresponding to the pilgrim status. We move next to ask, What is leisure?, specifically discussing its role in modern popular culture. Then we are prepared to answer the question, How do pilgrims have fun?

## The status of pilgrims

Abraham is the classic example of a "pilgrim and sojourner." He was a sojourner in Egypt (Gen. 12:10) and in Canaan (Gen. 17:8), and though he was very rich, he owned no land ex-



cept a grave for his wife Sarah. Even Israel remained throughout the Old Testament period a pilgrim people in Canaan, a mere tenant and sojourner before the face of God (Lev. 25:23). Psalm 39:12 is to the point: "Hear my prayer, O LORD, / listen to my cry for help; / be not deaf to my weeping. / For I dwell with you as an alien / a stranger as all my fathers were."

In 1 Peter 1:1 and 2:11 the word "sojourner" is used to refer to believers who have no country of their own on this earth, but live as temporary residents. In light of their status, they are not to permit themselves to be shaped by the values and views that determine life in this age and on this earth.

The metaphors of aliens, strangers, and foreigners are used within the New Testament in two distinct ways. First, the non-believer is pictured as a foreigner in relation to heaven, as someone who has no part in the community of God (Eph. 2:12,19; 4:18; Col. 1:21). The Christian, by contrast, is an alien in relation to this present world (Phil. 3:20; Eph. 2:19; 1 Pet. 2:9-11). In terms borrowed from Roman citizenship, in this present world enslaved to the principles of the fleshly existence, Christians belong to a subcommunity that has its own rules. They are not fully integrated into the surrounding culture, nor do they feel at home there.<sup>2</sup>

The New Testament writer to the Hebrews views the lives of Abraham and other Old Testament saints as being typical for believers, who throughout history are never really possessors, but only heirs, maintained by the promise (Heb. 11:13-16). This status of heirs is described by Paul: "Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory" (Rom. 8:17; cf. 4:13; Titus 3:7; Heb. 9:15). Possession of the inheritance is a matter of hope and expectation.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to distinguish between the pilgrim who was a "wandering foreigner" and the pilgrim who was a resident alien. In this speech, I am using the word "pilgrim" with the latter meaning, which I believe better avoids the connotation that the contact between believers and their surroundings is merely superficial. Our objective is not to travel as quickly as possible through this world to get to "the other side," but to persevere *within our vocation* until Christ returns.<sup>4</sup> Remember, then, that for our purposes, "pilgrim" means *resident alien*, or someone living temporarily in a land, though being a citizen of another country.

### The ethic of pilgrims

This pilgrim status has a corresponding pilgrim walk, a describable

lifestyle, as the apostle Peter observes: "Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear" (1 Pet. 1:17). More clearly still, he writes: "Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" (1 Pet. 2:11-12).

Here are several features of that pilgrim style:

#### 1. Pilgrimage involves antithesis.

The resident alien does not feel at home among the godless and arrogant. He meets opposition because of his love for God's commands and precepts (Ps. 119:19,54). Those whose citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20) experience a sense of alienation in the present culture. Because the people of God are "the called-out-ones," their life in the world is "a sojourn." The first term has reference to God, the second to the world.<sup>5</sup> Divine election brings with it the antithesis. Foreignness is established by believers' past election, and shaped by their future inheritance.<sup>6</sup> As 1 Peter 1:1-2 indicates, the status of sojourner results from election, since those called by God are differentiated from those not called.<sup>7</sup>

This alienation or uneasiness arises because present culture is dominated by a life-principle alien to the life-principle governing the believer. The child of God is born of the Spirit, from above (John 3:3,8). People who belong to this present age are "from the world" (1 John 4:5). This antithesis is a natural correlate of one's pilgrim status. This antithesis is both temporal (the believers is alienated from his former way of life) and latitudinal (those born of God are alienated from those not born of the Spirit).

#### 2. Though as pilgrims we never feel "at home" in modern culture, we do recognize our place and calling within the present culture.

Christ has not yet returned to distribute His inheritance. Therefore, we work while we wait. Earthly relationships are the arena of our labor, created by God to be good and to be received with thanksgiving. "We are sojourners, but then still in a world standing under Christ's lordship and in which *He* gives us a task. So, although

we are not yet “at home,” we are nevertheless in our element. The proclamation of the gospel and the gathering of Christ’s church is not yet complete. Until then, the Christian has his calling in these earthly relationships.”<sup>8</sup>

This phrase “until then” describes the eschatological orientation of Christian living. We work *while we wait*. All of life is governed by divine promise, such that our status as sojourners is never a permission to desert our posts.<sup>9</sup>

3. *The church of Jesus Christ both lives amid suffering and deprivation (although she is heir to everlasting life and blessedness) and already now enjoys a foretaste of eternal joy enabling her to delight in God’s good creation.*

Because the fullness of life is still coming, believers can do without a lot of things here and now; they can let go of much that the world pursues. Yet, believers rejoice heartily in their Creator and His creation. With mouths wide open, they praise His glory and wisdom; their eyes sparkle with delight as they enjoy His goodness and gifts, here and now.

The dimensions of Christian pilgrimage, then, reach back to creation and forward to the new heavens and the new earth. That future dimension that we describe with the word “foretaste” occasions so much tension in our sojourning lifestyle. Already now we possess in Christ so much, and still, the fullness and sinlessness of that possessing is not yet ours. This “already-not yet” character of pilgrim existence belongs to Christian existence, to history itself, and to the church’s identity throughout the present age, until Christ returns. Christians have tried to “solve” this tension, either by viewing the “now” as final (so that we’d better grab all the gusto we can) or by denying any possibility of genuine enjoyment in the “now” (postponing all fun until we get to heaven). These attempts effectively remove any tension between this world and the world to come, so that any real meaning to living as pilgrims here and now evaporates.

### What is leisure?

With this brief background sketch of the nature of Christian sojourning, we turn next to the matter of leisure in the Christian life. But before we can answer the question, How do pilgrims have fun?, we must consider the nature and place of leisure in modern life.



Mr. Ken Wieske, organist

In his very useful book, entitled *Re-deeming the Time: A Christian Approach to Work and Leisure* (1995), Leland Ryken writes his analysis of leisure right alongside an equally developed discussion of work. He combines what for most people live in separate compartments, namely, work and leisure. In fact, work and leisure derive much of their meaning from one another rather than by themselves. They obviously influence each other significantly.

Leisure can be defined in several ways (cf. Ryken, 23-28).

(1) In relation to time, leisure is simply *free time*. It is nonwork, in that it does

not answer to a sense of duty or obligation. The “freeness” of one’s leisure is often determined by subjective factors, such as personal enjoyment and delight in the nonwork activity.

(2) But to say that leisure is nonwork does not mean leisure is inactivity. In fact, leisure consists often of pursuing very specific activities. Think, for example, of cultural pursuits, recreation, hobbies, social relationships, and entertainment.

### Leisure’s function as part of culture

Leisure enhances life. Leisure yields benefits like satisfaction with living,

personal enrichment, receptivity to beauty, celebration, and cultural development. People speak of leisure in terms of rest, relaxation, recovery from fatigue, cultivation, and the like. Just as one's work serves to fashion a person's identity in the world, so too one's leisure activities fulfill a psychological and social role in personal self-realization. Perhaps our inability to readily perceive this truth is an indication that we haven't devoted enough responsible reflection to the development of leisure activities.

An important social function of leisure is the maintenance of communities. Think, for example, of the family. Family vacations create memories which, whether or not they are handed down to the next generation, can fashion inter-generational identity. The industrial sector has come to realize the significance of leisure activities, as a source of interpersonal bonding and a means of enhancing collegiality within and across strata of responsibility within a corporation.

Ryken helpfully identifies several ethical viewpoints that are hostile to leisure, that make having fun a suspicious endeavor. I mention them because I think one or more of these viewpoints may be functioning within our particular subculture.

The enjoyment of leisure is opposed, for example, by a *utilitarian ethic*, which values only those activities that have a measurable, observable, tangible payoff: better health, more income, increased fitness for work. People with a strong work ethic tend to justify leisure only in terms of its usefulness for increased productivity. But leisure's genuine effectiveness lies in going beyond the requirements of life and labor, reaching for a kind of gratuitous delight.

Another moral impulse hostile to leisure is the *ethic of self-abasement*. (We don't have the time or space here, but it is important to refine Ryken's point here by distinguishing self-abasement from self-denial.) This ethic of self-abasement has no room for pleasure. But pleasure is intrinsic to leisure; feeling good is an important element in fun. In an ethic that denies any room for pleasure, leisure and play become its first victims.

In summary, to understand the role of leisure in culture, we might describe culture as an ever-changing set of objects, institutions, fashions, relationships, tastes, habits, and loves, all em-

bodied in people and associations, in buildings and books, in humor and art, in food and fun.<sup>10</sup> Leisure "flourishes only when people believe in the goodness of pleasure and human fulfillment. It withers when people are lazy, preoccupied with what is useful, or given to self-[abasement]."<sup>11</sup>

### Leisure and popular culture

But there is another, much more pervasive challenge being mounted against leisure in our day, in the form of what has come to be called "pop culture." In his engaging description of how popular culture influences modern society, Kenneth Myers describes the novelty of pop culture in distinction from, say, high culture or folk culture.

Both high culture and traditional or folk culture, says Myers, are mediated by conventions that require discipline. To participate in these kinds or levels of culture, you must be familiar with and submissive to their traditions.

By contrast, popular culture provides instant gratification without the need for discipline or familiarity. The messages and modes of pop culture, whose idiom is rock 'n roll and whose medium is television, require little activity or effort. This fact accounts for the power and the pervasiveness of pop culture in modern society.

Popular culture is far more than the latest in a series of diversions; it is essentially a culture of diversion. The Industrial Revolution of the previous century has yielded the benefit of more free time, along with increasing boredom needing to be overcome by more powerful forms of distraction. The forty-hour work-week has left us with time and money, so-called "discretionary" time and money. The apparatuses of popular culture – the TV, VCR, CD players, boom boxes, graphic equalizers, computer games, and cablevision – all provide us with unending, instant newness.

Within modern pop culture, leisure is filled by entertainment. Television, music, and cinema have come of age to deliver *the new* and *the now*. Such entertainment/leisure relies on instant accessibility and it appeals to sentimentality. It is market-driven and therefore highly individualistic and vigorously egalitarian. The moral message of popular culture tends toward relativism. Its expressions can only be used rather than received (in contrast to high culture, which requires self-exertion to understand and appreciate). Popular

culture has become the great equalizer: Madonna's perspective on the current environmental crisis is just as valid as that of any scientist at M.I.T., and Elton John is as significant a symbol of national virtue as Winston Churchill.

The single most significant medium of shared reality in our entire society today is the television.<sup>12</sup> In television we live and move and have our being. Modern culture accords to TV the role once reserved for God, namely, that of defining reality. The Image rather than the Word has become the basic unit of communication. But the kinds of knowledge they communicate are very different. Image-knowledge is intuitive and immediate. Word-knowledge is abstract, analytical, linear, and logical in form. One simple way to understand this is to realize that an image cannot be true or false. Images can present only a story, never an argument. Images are pervasively non-judgmental and non-demanding.

It would be unfair only to condemn and speak negatively about television, however. Because it has become such a powerful tool of communication in modern society, it has other purposes than entertainment. We need to learn how to understand its power, its limitations, its messaging capacity. Every invention brings advantages and disadvantages, and just as with every scientific discovery, this piece of technology places great responsibility on us.

– to be continued

<sup>1</sup>Edited text of speech delivered at Redeemer College on November 13, 1997 as part of the series "Being a Christian in Today's Culture," sponsored by the Burlington Reformed Study Centre.

<sup>2</sup>F. Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons: Legal Metaphors in the Epistles*, (1984), 58-60; P.S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, (1960), 61-62.

<sup>3</sup>J. Douma, *Algemene genade*, (1966), 351.

<sup>4</sup>J. Douma, *Algemene genade*, 352.

<sup>5</sup>K.L. and M.A. Schmidt in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (1968), 5.852.

<sup>6</sup>L. Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, (1993), 68.

<sup>7</sup>W.H. Velema, *Ethiek en pilgrimage*, (1979), 18.

<sup>8</sup>J. Douma, *Algemene genade*, 352.

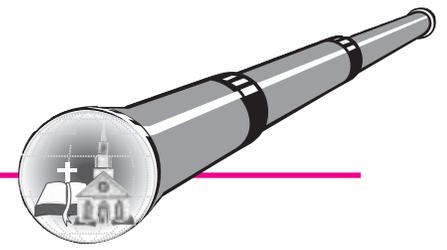
<sup>9</sup>W.H. Velema, *Ethiek en pilgrimage*, 25.

<sup>10</sup>See K. A. Myers, *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes*, (1989), 34.

<sup>11</sup>L. Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, (1995), 33.

<sup>12</sup>Myers, *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes*, 160.





# Observation Deck

By J. VanRietschoten

From the *Observation Deck* we can scan the national and international church scene. News released in magazines and newspapers and on pages on the internet enable us to observe and comment on what we see.

## URCNA

Our first visit is with the *Christian Observer* of Nov. 11, '97.

From the *Observer* we pass on a piece of news from the recent (Oct. '97) synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). So far the *Observer* is the only one with whom I have read this so I pass it on with the fervent hope that their observation is correct. I say "with fervent hope," for this decision of the URCNA is a step forward in adopting well-tested Reformed practice of church polity. The quotation from the *Christian Observer* is as follows:

A revised statement regarding the decisions of the broader assemblies reads,

All decisions of a broader assembly are to be received with respect and submission, and shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved that they are in conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order.

Most of our readers will recognize the words of this decision as part of Article 31 of the Church Order of Dordt (Middelburg 1581) found in the Church Order of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches. By adopting this article, the URCNA have joined also the Reformed churches in Holland, South Africa, and Australia, who all maintain the "safety valve" of Article 31. This article protects the churches against hierarchy. Maintaining the way of "unless" arms the local church against possible oppression from classes or synods. With the "safety valve" of Article 31 churches need not flee into independentism. Within the federation of churches, churches need one another's mutual support and supervision. When we maintain Article 31 we can do this without fear.

## Missions

Our second visit is with *Nederlands Dagblad* of Sept. 19, '97. There we no-

ted an item: Toward mission "new-style."

In the field of mission a redirection is noticeable. Mission old-style (aimed at church planting) changes over to mission new-style (aid/assistance with church consolidation and growth).

We have an example of this in our churches. The Rev. H. Versteeg for years worked at church planting in Irian Jaya. For the last number of years his reports in *Mission News* familiarized us with the stumbling blocks the Indonesian government places in the way of mission work. New church planting must now be done by the churches of Irian themselves. Our churches may only support this work. As minister to the Church at Chatham, Ontario, the Rev. Versteeg will still (to some extent) be involved in assisting the churches in Irian. He will do so on behalf of the churches.

Synod 1998 of our sister churches in the Netherlands will receive a report concerning this redirection in their mission efforts. It is possible that a prior report, to be issued by a mission conference, will influence the report to be submitted to their synod. The following quotation suggests a moving away from "sending churches" to a "mission foundation." With new-style mission

"word and deed" belong inseparably together, so that besides deputies for contact with foreign churches (BBK) also deputies for aid to foreign churches (HBK) are formed. The deputies HBK delegate the execution of the directives to a professional organization: the Foundation for Execution of Word and Deed (STUW&D).

New directions in mission may be necessary. Whether a "foundation" must take over the task of the churches is questionable, however. This development deserves our attention, especially with respect to Synod 1998 of our sister churches.

## United Church of Canada

Our third visit brings us back to the Canadian scene: The United Church of Canada.<sup>1</sup> By way of the internet we

found the, "*Current Executive of General Council Response to Issues Raised by the Interview of the Moderator, the Right Reverend Bill Phipps, with the Ottawa Citizen.*"

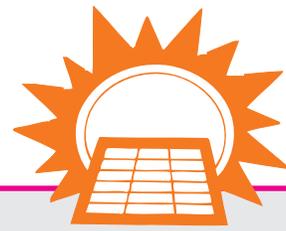
In this *Response*, the Council does not quote the statements of the Moderator to the *Ottawa Citizen* (in which he raised doubts concerning the divinity and resurrection of Jesus Christ.) The Council acknowledged instead, "that there is pain in the body of Christ." The council received letters, faxes, e-mails, and responses from various "table groups." Under the heading "Pastoral Concerns," the Council reports that it has heard from some who have experienced pain, alienation, anger, and frustration. For them it has been a difficult time. They have expressed their sense that the Moderator's remarks are a challenge to deeply held personal beliefs and to The United Church of Canada doctrines.

The upshot of the Council's *Response* is that the United Church of Canada wants to maintain adherence to "doctrinal standards" and yet at the same time make room for diversity.

We have doctrinal standards and attempt to set them forth in continuity with the Biblical faith. But our grasp is finite and fallible, and we do not believe that faithfulness consists in assenting to particular statements. Rarely, if ever, do we use doctrinal standards to exclude one from the circle of belonging. Rather we lift up Jesus Christ and His way, saying to all who seek God's grace and service, "Come and see."

The Executive of the General Council makes clear that statements made by the Moderator are not official statements of the church. Such statements are made only by the "courts of the church." Yet, "it is the role of the Moderator . . . to call the church to faithfulness and obedience to Christ. . . ." Which Christ? The Christ of the Moderator's statements or the Christ of the doctrinal standards?

<sup>1</sup>The United Church of Canada is the largest "Protestant" church in Canada. It was formed at the union of several churches in 1925. 



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

*"This is the day which the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."*  
Psalm 118:24

## Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Almost every one knows the song that is based on the above mentioned text, taken from Psalm 118:

*This is the day, this is the day  
That the Lord has made,  
that the Lord has made.  
Let us rejoice, let us rejoice  
And be glad in it, and be glad in it!  
This is the day that the Lord has made.  
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.  
This is the day, this is the day  
that the Lord has made.*

Even little children sing this song already. And maybe we still do.

When we read through the Bible, we find many places where we are told to be *happy*, or *glad*, to find joy in what we are doing, and to *rejoice* in the Lord.

There are many things that can make us happy, too. When we look around us we can see much beauty: when the daylight returns after a dark night, and we see the sun shine in a blue sky, when we see all the beautiful flowers and the green trees. There are the many birds, big and small, with shiny coats of feathers, flying high up in the skies, and singing their songs. We can observe how the Lord takes care of His creation, when all the plants die off in the fall in order to be able to bear the cold of winter, and then be ready for growth again in the spring. The Lord even makes tiny birds, like the hummingbirds, fly long distances in the fall to escape the cold of our winters, and then to come back here again in the spring, to the same spot where they were before. Even scientists have to stand in awe for God's creation, and the wisdom and care and thought that He has put into everything living.

When we pay attention to the wonderful world around us, we surely have to see Him Who made it all, and give Him praise. Then we can rejoice even on a winter day when the weather is cold, and the trees look dead. For we know that it is not going to stay like that! And if the Lord even looks after the tiny birds, then He certainly will also look after us and give us what is best for us.

But do we always look at things so happily? Can we face every new day with a smile and a song as a day that the Lord has made and in which we have to rejoice? Probably not. Some days we cannot smile at all, and maybe we look up against the new day, not know-

ing how to cope with the things that are facing us. Maybe there is pain or loneliness or bills that we cannot pay. Or we may have to stay in the house for another long day because it is too cold outside. There are so many things that may be bothering us, and make our days rough and miserable. We even might have caused all our troubles ourselves because we forgot about the Lord and went our own ways. Then we snicker when we hear about rejoicing and being happy. There is nothing anymore that can make us happy.

It is very sad if we live our days without rejoicing. But the good news is, we do not have to feel that way! All we have to do is, to open our eyes and ears to the truth of God's Word. For listen to this: this is not the end of our lives! It is only a beginning. We are not here to stay, we are on our way to life on a new earth. On that new earth God's wonderful works will be fully revealed to us. There will be a new creation, perfect and without sin. There will be no more cold weather, nor the need for birds to migrate to warmer climates. Nobody will be in pain or lonely or in debt. We will all be perfectly healthy and happy.

How great it will be when every day we will be glad and rejoice in the Lord, *our* Lord, Who for the sake of Christ our Saviour, is our caring and loving Father.

*Praise His majesty understandingly;  
God is King alone on His holy throne,  
Issues His commands to all heathen lands.  
Lo, their princes all gather at His call:  
His the shields of earth, His the power, the worth;  
He the God on high, is our Helper nigh.*

Psalm 47:3

## Birthdays in February:

**12: Conny Van Amerongen**  
35 Bredin Pky #102  
Orangeville, ON L9X 3X1

**18: Cora Schoonhoven**  
24 James Speight  
Markham, ON L3P 3G4

It will be Conny's 33rd birthday, and Cora's 47th. Happy Birthday to both of you.

Until next month,

Mrs. R. Ravensbergen  
7462 Hwy. 20, RR 1,  
Smithville, ON L0R 2A0



## Press Release of the Board of Governors of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches

**Subject: Meeting of the Board of Governors held on September 4, 1997**

### Opening

The Meeting is opened by the Chairman, Dr. J. Visscher with the reading of 1 Timothy 1:1-12 and prayer. The passing of br. Adri Van Egmond, a member of the Board and the Finance and Property Committee, is remembered.

### Roll Call

All Board Members are present, together with the Principal, Dr. N.H. Gootjes.

### Election of Officers

The following governors are re-appointed as officers of the Board:

Chairman:	Dr. J. Visscher
Vice-Chairman:	Karl J. Veldkamp
Secretary:	Rev. D.G.J. Agema
Treasurer:	H.J. Sloots

### Minutes

The minutes of the Board meetings held on September 5, 1996 and February 13, 1997 are approved.

### Report of the Executive

The Executive reports on their activities for the last year. The Secretary provides a summary of the correspondence received and sent for the previous academic year.

### Report of the Academic Committee

The committee reports on their annual meeting held on September 4, 1997.

### Report of the Finance and Property Committee

The committee presents their fifteenth annual report, advising the Board that the regular matters of the College continue unabated. It is noted again with thankfulness that the Lord

continues to bless the College abundantly and that the support of the Churches, including that of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, continues faithfully. What follows are some notable matters reported upon and dealt with:

- a. The committee submits names as nominations for replacements to their committee. With the passing of br. Adri Van Egmond and the retirement of br. K.J. Veldkamp two replacements are required. Following discussion the Board agrees on individuals who will be nominated. The names of such individuals will be submitted to Synod Fergus 1998.
- b. It is reported that a substantial monetary gift had been received from an estate of a deceased member of one of our churches. It is agreed that this gift will be allocated towards the contemplated expansion of the College facilities. Such a gift is gratefully acknowledged.
- c. The matters of the professors had the attention of the committee. An in-depth review is in the process of being conducted to ensure that there is compliance with the decision of Synod Burlington, 1986 and that the needs of the professors are being met.
- d. The financial considerations relating to the sabbatical taken by Dr. Van Dam are reviewed. The cost of sabbaticals continues to be an annual budgetary item consistent with the decision of Synod Lincoln, 1992.

### Report of the Convocation Committee

The report of the Convocation Committee is received. Details relating to the format of convocation are finalized.

### Reports

The reports of the Senate, Visits to the Lectures, the Principal, visits to the Churches in Alberta/Manitoba, the Librarian, and the Registrar are received with gratitude. The College will have three new students for its Freshman year entering the Master of Divinity Program. The new students are Eric Morderdyk (Free Reformed Church in Grand

Rapids, Michigan), Peter John Sikkema (Canadian Reformed Church-Fergus, Ontario) and Carl Vermeulen (Free Reformed Church at Kelmscott, Australia).

### Visitor's Schedule – 1997-98

It is agreed that Rev. C. Van Spronsen and Dr. J. Visscher will visit the lectures in the Fall of 1997 and Rev. den Hollander and Rev. D.G.J. Agema in the Spring of 1998.

### Report of the Ad Hoc Committee regarding Practical Training at the College

Recommendations with regard to practical training at the College are presented. The report presented is a further refinement of a previously presented report, with amendments and refinement based upon the input of the Churches. A program leading to a Certificate of Pastoral Proficiency is described and discussed in detail. With minor amendments the proposal is approved for submission to Synod Fergus, 1998.

### Report on the Building Expansion Committee

The final report of the building expansion committee, consisting of the submission to Synod Fergus, 1998 is received by the Board. It is approved.

### Financial Assistance for Foreign Students

The ad hoc committee which has been considering the possibility and feasibility of the College establishing a fund for the assistance of foreign/international students reported to the Board. The matter is discussed with no specific conclusions. Further work is required and cooperation will be sought with sister church organizations on an international basis.

### Promotion Committee

This committee reports on its activities. One of its primary initiatives is the finalization of a poster for placement in the churches. The intent of such poster is to better profile and highlight the activities of the College and the role of the College for the Churches.

## Report re Dr. Van Dam re sabbatical/trip to Juan Calvino Seminary-Mexico

A written report of the Dr. Van Dam regarding his sabbatical taken in the latter half of 1996 is received and discussed. Dr. Van Dam outlines the various initiatives that he was permitted, by the additional time, to undertake and complete. Dr. Van Dam opines that the implementation of a sabbatical arrangement was very valuable to both professor and the College community.

The report of Dr. Van Dam regarding his visit to the Juan Calvino Seminary in Mexico City, Mexico is also received with gratitude.

### Next Meeting

The Board hopes to meet once again, D.V., on November 19, 1997. Final material and reports for Synod Fergus, 1998 are to be finalized at that time.

### Closing

The meeting is closed in the usual Christian manner.

## Press Release of Classis Ontario North, December 12, 1997

1. On behalf of the convening church at Fergus br. H. Bouwman called the meeting to order. He requested the brothers to sing Ps. 63:1,2. He led in prayer and read Philippians 2:1-11.
2. The credentials were examined by the delegates of Elora. Burlington Ebenezer had an instruction. There was also a request from the church at Orangeville to correct a date in the Acts of Classis September 11-12, 1997 .
3. Classis was constituted. The appointed officers were: chairman: Rev. J.G. Slaa; vice-chairman: Rev. G. Nederveen; clerk: Rev. A.J. Pol.
4. Memorabilia: The chairman thanked the convening church at Fergus for preparing classis. He mentioned that two churches witnessed the ordination of young brothers. Orangeville received Rev. R.E. Pot who was present at classis for the first time. Toronto received Rev. S. 't Hart. Toronto also said farewell to the Rev. H. Versteeg. The churches of Fergus and Flamborough remained vacant. Fergus

- did not extend a call; the call by Flamborough to Rev. J. DeGelder was declined. The chairman wished these churches well in their endeavour to have their vacancies filled.
5. The agenda was adopted after several reports were added to the provisional agenda.
    - Examination of a brother re: speaking an edifying word. The necessary documents were presented and found to be in good order. Classis proceeded to the examination. After the sermon proposal Classis decided to continue with the examination. Rev. P.G. Feenstra examined the student on Doctrine and Creeds. Classis judged the examination to be insufficient and decided not to grant the brother permission to speak an edifying word in the churches. The officers of classis informed him of the decision and this meeting was closed in prayer by the chairman.
  7. Classis stopped for lunch.
  8. The chairman called the meeting back to order. He requested the brothers to sing Hymn 53. Roll call showed that every one was present.
  9. Reports:
    - a. Church visitation reports to the churches at Burlington Ebenezer, Burlington South, Fergus, Grand Valley, Ottawa, Owen Sound and Toronto were read. These positive reports were received with gratitude.
    - b. The treasurer explained the assessment of \$2.00 per communicant member which was provisionally approved by Classis September 11-12, 1997. Classis was satisfied with the explanation and the assessment for 1998 stands at \$2.00.
  10. Question Period according to art. 44 C.O. The church at Burlington Ebenezer sought advice in a matter of discipline. Advice was given.
  11. Proposals and instructions
    - a) Fellowship Church at Burlington-South overtured classis to request and overture General Synod, to be held May 1998, D.V., to propose to the churches, either,
      - 1) as a common practice, "that in the matter of voting for office bearers, all communicant members (including the sisters in the congregation), be invited to participate and partake in the vote";

- or in the alternative,
  - 2) that Article 3 of the Church Order be deemed to allow freedom for the local churches to make regulations to permit all communicant members (including the sisters in the congregation), to participate and partake in the vote.
- Classis declared this correspondence admissible.
12. Classis stopped for dinner.
  13. The chairman called the meeting to order. We sang Ps. 146:1 and 3. The roll call showed everyone present.
  14. After ample discussion and several amendments, classis decided not to accede to the request of Burlington South.
  15. Correspondence
    - a. Appeal of a brother against Fellowship Church at Burlington-South with the request to judge that
      - "the consistory of the Canadian Reformed Church of Burlington South, introducing individual cups for the celebration of the Lord's supper, has not advanced sufficient Scriptural grounds for departing significantly from the celebration, as outlined in the Bible, where the use of the communal cup is highlighted."
- Classis declared the appeal admissible. Upon due consideration classis denied the appeal.
16. Appointments
    - a. Convening church for the next classis: Flamborough. Date: March 13, 1998 at Burlington East church building.
    - b. Suggested officers for the next classis: chairman: Rev. J.L. Van Popta; clerk: Rev. J.G. Slaa; vice-chairman: Rev. A.J. Pol.
  17. Several brothers made use of the question period.
  18. Censure according to art. 34 C.O. was not necessary.
  19. The Acts were adopted and the Press Release approved.
  20. The chairman requested the brothers to sing Psalm 133 and led in closing prayer.

For Classis Ontario North  
December 11, 1997  
G. Nederveen,  
vice-chairman at that time 